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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8874
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1900
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5378
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8971
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6547
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4376
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2365
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000226

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA'S WATER FESTIVAL: OPPOSITION LAYS LOW; THUGS
TARGET FIVE NLD MEMBERS

REF: A. 08 RANGOON 274

[1](#)B. 08 RANGOON 234

[1](#)C. 08 RANGOON 245

Classified By: Poloff Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Burma's political opposition laid low during the April 13-17 Thingyan water festival and Burmese New Year, with no overt political activities reported during the five-day long national celebration. However, thugs, presumably on orders from the regime, beat up five National League for Democracy (NLD) members between April 10 and 19, and a person friendly to the NLD was arrested. Undeterred, the NLD still plans to hold a national meeting at its Rangoon headquarters on April 28 and 29 to discuss its political strategy in the run-up to the planned 2010 elections. End Summary.

The Opposition Lays Low

[1](#)2. (C) Despite the normal presence of massive crowds during the five-day-long Thingyan festival, we did not observe or receive reports of any overt political activities anywhere in the country. Unlike last year when some opposition activists attempted to use Thingyan as a cover to distribute anti-referendum political materials (Ref A), this year, as foreshadowed by embassy contacts, the opposition and pro-democracy community did not organize demonstrations or protests. 88 Generation Students activist Toe Kyaw Hlaing told us he and some of his colleagues planned to use the holiday as a cover to gather privately and discuss politics. (Note: we are seeking a readout of any such meetings).

Beatings of Opposition Figures

[1](#)3. (C) Unfortunately, during Thingyan, thugs beat up several NLD members in Rangoon. NLD spokesman Nyan Win reported five assaults of NLD members in four separate incidents between April 10 and 19. All five men were beaten by unknown assailants in broad daylight as they walked down the street.

None of the five victims were seriously injured and all are recovering at home. All five have filed complaints with the police, who so far have not investigated the attacks, according to Nyan Win, who commented that the attacks were very similar to a number of assaults on activists last year during the March-April period. (Refs B and C). The NLD believes the five NLD members were targeted by the regime as a result of their political affiliation and activities.

¶4. (C) The NLD's Nyan Win told us that on April 13 - the first day of Thingyan - Rangoon authorities arrested Ko Thiha Tun at his home. While not an NLD member, Ko Thiha Tun is reportedly close to several NLD members. Police have not provided a reason for the arrest or any information about Ko Thiha Tun's condition.

An Undeterred NLD to Hold National Meeting

¶5. (C) Despite the recent assaults, Nyan Win informed us the NLD plans to hold a national meeting at its Rangoon headquarters on April 28 and 29 to discuss political strategy. The Central Executive Committee has invited five NLD representatives from each of the 14 states and divisions as well as all NLD MPs-elect and various women and youth NLD members to attend the two-day meeting. Nyan Win told us the purpose of the meeting will be to decide upon the party's strategy and policy in the run-up to the 2010 elections. Leading NLD youth member Aye Tun cautioned us not to expect too much in the way of decisive new action, saying that the

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NLD will likely reaffirm its current platform and will not initiate any new programs or policies. According to Nyan Win, the NLD last held a similar meeting in October 2008, and has held at least one such gathering each year since 2005.

Comment

¶6. (C) The Thingyan water festival provides the Burmese people with a one-week escape from the hardships of life under the regime. Many of us, including the Charge, participated in last week's celebrations and were impressed with how joyful the festivities were, in general. That said, street violence, which ordinarily is uncommon in Rangoon, does often increase during Thingyan, most likely because many young men get publicly, thoroughly drunk. Still, unprovoked daylight assaults are extremely rare. On April 19, the New Light of Myanmar claimed that the number of assaults and injuries over Thingyan actually decreased this year and attributed the drop to the "civilized" manner of the Burmese people. It is not surprising that NLD leaders see the military regime as behind the unfortunate assaults on five NLD members. Presumably the NLD is right, given the regime's track record of constantly harassing opponents, even during what is supposed to be the most joyous time of the year.

DINGER